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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7923
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 7324
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 9854
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 1804
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI PRIORITY 6861
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 002034

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STATE FOR EAP/MLS, NSC FOR BADER

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: RED SHIRTS PEACEFULLY PETITION THE KING

REF: A. A. BANGKOK 2009 (ABHISIT CHECK-UP)

[1](#)B. B. BANGKOK 1817 (AMBASSADOR MEETS WITH REDSHIRTS)

[1](#)C. C. BANGKOK 1265 (POLITICAL ROUNDUP)

[1](#)D. D. BANGKOK 1157 (POLITICAL IMPASSE)

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Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission James F. Entwistle, reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY AND COMMENT

[1](#)1. (C) On August 17, more than 20,000 "red-shirt" sympathizers of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra assembled in a park adjacent to the Grand Palace to show support for a massive signature gathering petition campaign seeking royal amnesty for Thaksin (Ref A). Despite wide spread concerns leading up to the rally, the event took place without incident. Thaksin called in before and after the rally, thanking supporters for their efforts on his behalf and pledging loyalty to the King. Event organizers claimed the petition campaign itself netted some 5 million signatures, which were subsequently delivered to the King's Principal Private Secretary at the Palace gates. According to Thai law, the petition will now move to the Ministry of Justice and the Prime Minister's office for review and an official recommendation to the King. Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva has already signaled that he will reject Thaksin's clemency bid on legal grounds.

[1](#)2. (C) Comment: On one hand, Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva dodged a major bullet today as fears of an unruly mob of red shirts fighting in the streets failed to materialize. On the other hand, Thaksin and his supporters achieved their primary goal: they successfully dragged the King into the political mud. Even if there is no formal legal mechanism or requirement for the King to entertain the amnesty petition, by stirring up such a public spectacle, Thaksin managed to corner those around the King, the bureaucrat-aristocrats known as "amat" that the red-shirts seek to displace (the slogan from the April red-shirt protests was "Kon amat" - overthrow the aristocrats). If Abhisit follows through on his promise to weigh-in against the petition, or if Palace officials opt to slow roll it (they normally have up to a year to respond), the red-shirts will likely claim the "amat" are preventing the people's appeal to their King. Either way, Thaksin has created what he hopes will be a lose-lose proposition for the government and his opponents, a

clear sign that he intends to continue to make life difficult for Abhisit for the foreseeable future. End Summary and Comment.

RED SHIRTS ASSEMBLE PEACEFULLY

¶3. (C) On August 17, more than 20,000 members of the anti-government United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) gathered peacefully in a park across from the Grand Palace (Note: the head count ranges from 20,000 to 50,000, depending on the source. End Note.) The group assembled in a show of support for the UDD's petition seeking royal amnesty for former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. The majority of the Thaksin supporters were bussed in from the north and northeast and they began arriving en masse as early as one in the morning. They braved early morning thundershowers and were treated in return to a festive atmosphere marked by music, food, and a 30 minute phone-in speech by their hero, former PM Thaksin. Despite wide spread concerns leading up to the gathering about the potential for unrest, no incidents were reported. Some 4000 police officers stayed on the scene throughout the day to maintain the peace.

¶4. (C) During his call-in speech just after 10am, Thaksin thanked his supporters for their efforts on his behalf, exhorted them to continue to their fight for "justice," and maintained his innocence. Thaksin then led the crowd in chants of "Long Live the King," swore his allegiance to the Crown and -- for good measure -- sang a pro-monarchy song. Thaksin also praised the King's role as a unifying figure and asked Thai citizens to unite "under the same color."

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¶5. (C) At approximately 1pm, 15 red shirts notables (including five monks) approached the Grand Palace gates with the petition seeking Royal clemency for Thaksin, as well as 38 boxes packed with some 5 million signatures in support of the petition. UDD heavyweight Veera Musikapong read the petition aloud, before handing it over to Mr. Inchan Buraphan, the King's Deputy Principal Private Secretary. Palace officials and law enforcement authorities then inspected the boxes for over an hour, before bringing them into the Palace compound for processing. Veera and the red shirts then moved back across to the park and led the crowd in a spirited rendition of the Royal Anthem. At just after 230pm, the crowd dispersed without incident.

NEXT STEPS FOR THE PETITION

¶6. (C) As a practical matter, the petition itself is not likely to have any impact on the outstanding legal cases pending against Thaksin. While Thai law does allow for two types of Royal petitions: general and legal, the UDD petition fails to meet the requirements for either. General petitions cannot be filed in criminal cases, while legal petitions can only be filed in the event a Thai citizen has already been incarcerated. In the case of a criminal petition, only the individual already incarcerated, his or her family members, or the Ministry of Justice can file the petition with the King.

¶7. (C) After the petition is processed by Palace officials, it will eventually work its way to the Ministry of Justice and the Prime Minister's office for a formal review of the merits of the case. The Prime Minister's office will then forward a recommendation to the King for his consideration. Given the fact that PM Abhisit already announced that he would dismiss the petition on legal grounds, there appears to be little mystery about what will happen next. Though the King could theoretically choose to override PM Abhisit's recommendation to dismiss the petition, given its serious procedural flaws, the King is almost certain to concur with

the PM's decision.

THAKSIN'S SAVVY MANEUVER

18. (C) While the petition itself will probably not pave the way for Thaksin's return to Thailand, all the hoopla and attendant coverage surrounding the signature drive and UDD rally put Thaksin back in his favorite place: the spotlight. Probably even more importantly from Thaksin's perspective, the amnesty campaign successfully dragged the King into the political trenches, compelling him to take a public stand one way or another on the amnesty petition.

19. (C) During an August 14 meeting with core red shirt leaders Jaran Ditapichai and Weng Tojirakarn, Jaran openly admitted to us that the UDD's primary objective in the petition campaign was to drag the King into politics. Jaran characterized the signature gathering campaign and upcoming rally as a "win-win" proposition for Thaksin and the red shirts, and conceded the group never expected the King would grant Thaksin his amnesty in the first place.

JOHN